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The acquisition of the Dutch quantitative pronoun ER: the role of background language(s)

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Introduction
This study looks at transfer from L1 French and L1 English to the L2 Dutch. We specifically look at the ability to judge and imitate morphosyntactic and semantic structures with the quantitative pronoun ER.

Dutch
French
English

Syntactic
presence vs absence
Ik lees ER drie
Je EN la trento
I read three
Ik lees ER drie
Je EN la troi
I read three

Semantics
indefiniteness vs definiteness
Ik les ER een heliboel
J EN is un grand nombre
I read many
Ik les ER ommege
Je EN is certains
I read some
Ik lees ER de drie
Je EN is la moitié
I read half

Based on Full Transfer/Full Access,
Predictions
grammaticality judgement task
3 experimental conditions (N=30), 15 fillers
sentence imitation task
3 experimental conditions (N=12), 8 fillers
dutch vocabulary task, digit span, questionnaire

Materials
- Grammaticality Judgement Task
  - 3 experimental conditions (N=30), 15 fillers
- Sentence Imutation Task
  - 3 experimental conditions (N=12), 8 fillers
- Dutch Vocabulary Task, Digit Span, Questionnaire

Participants
L1 Participants
L1 French (N=25), highly advanced, level > B2
L1 English (N=25), highly advanced, level > B2
L1 Dutch (N=25)

Average years of exposure: L1 French (22.1), L1 English (19.7)

Comparison results French-Dutch and English-Dutch

SI
Dutch
L1 French
L1 English

Syntax
presence
positive
negative

Semantics
indefiniteness
definiteness
non-presuppositionality

French-Dutch comparison: no difference
English-Dutch comparison: no difference

Comparison results French-English

GJT
Dutch
L1 French
L1 English

Syntax
presence
positive
no difference

Semantics
indefiniteness
definiteness
non-presuppositionality

French-English comparison: no difference

Discussion
Our predictions were based on Dutch being the L2 for both groups. However, all of the L1 French participants speak English too, and since all participants live in The Netherlands they come into contact with English on a regular basis. This leads to the idea that Dutch is in fact their L3.

By considering Dutch as an L3 for the L1 French group, we implemented the L2 Status Factor (Bardel and Fark 2007) that claims that the L2 acts as a filter, thereby blocking transfer from the L1 at the syntactic level. Thus, the L2 might have a bigger impact on learning the L3 than the L1. In that case we do not expect to find significant differences between the L1 French and the L1 English groups.

No significant difference between the L1 French and L1 English groups have been found in the GJT, thereby confirming the L2 Status Factor.

Conclusion
Our goal was to look at the role of L1 French and L1 English on the L2 acquisition of the Dutch quantitative pronoun ER. However, we found that for the L1 English group Dutch is considered the ‘real L2’, and for the L1 French group English should be considered the L2 and Dutch the L3, thereby confirming the L2 Status Factor.

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